



Disaster and Emergency Management Resources

Emotional Reactions to Disasters

- In addition to causing property damage, a disaster event can cause an emotional reaction by impacted families. How people deal with these emotional reactions may affect their recovery afterwards.
- Initially, disaster victims tend to focus on the task of responding to property damages including salvaging their belongings and cleaning. This allows people to keep working. But there may be a sense of unreality during the disaster. Other powerful feelings may surface:
 - Panic, feeling out of control, or anger
 - generosity toward others
 - despair
 - anxiety or uncertainty
 - disorientation
 - cooperation or teamwork
- The full force of the emotional reactions often hit after the disaster has passed and cleaning up begins. That is when exhaustion, grief, desperation, and depression may set in. It is important to pay more attention to emotional reactions once the emergency crews go home.
- One of the first things people can do is pull together. It is important to ask for help. There are many people around who want to help and will help. They just need to know what to do. Help from others may make the critical difference between coping and prolonged suffering.
- It is also important for people to take care of their own physical and emotional needs by eating a balanced diet to fuel their energy, and as much as possible, getting enough sleep.
- As people deal with the aftermath of a disaster, they can talk with others about their feelings.

- If any of your friends, family members or neighbors have been impacted by a disaster, you can undertake several measures to help them deal with the stress and emotions:
 - Provide practical help in dealing with the disaster. Furnish meals. Store belongings or provide a place to stay. Parents may be very busy; offer to spend some time with children to play and to listen to their concerns. Offer specific types of help or ask how you can help.
 - Listen. When others talk about their experiences and feelings, their emotional load seems lighter to bear. One of the best ways you can help is to just listen. You don't have to come up with solutions or answers. It's okay if someone breaks down and cries. Others will ask, "Why me?" They are not really looking for an answer but expressing their hurt.
 - Show by words and actions that you care. Go ahead and act. Don't be afraid of saying or doing the wrong thing. A few words of support and encouragement can help in times of crisis. Small, kind deeds and sincere expressions of affection or admiration also will mean a lot.
 - Keep helping. The disruptions caused by the disaster may continue for some time. Recovering may take even longer. Your friends or family members will need regular, small acts of kindness to maintain their morale and to put their lives back together.

Adapted from resource material developed by the Kansas State Extension Service